

SPEECH OF WILLIAM LLOYD GARRISON

ON THE

Movement for the Abolition of State- Regulation of Vice.

At a Meeting of the friends of this movement, held in London on the 29th June, 1877, under the auspices of the National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, Mr. GARRISON said:—

“ I have heard of your doings, when on the other side of the Atlantic, and my heart went out to you. I felt myself one with you in spirit, one with you in your aim. I often said,—you did not hear me, but I said in my heart, many times,—with my heart's voice I said, ‘ God bless the noble men and women now striving to cleanse the land of England from the foul pollution implied by such atrocious laws as they are working to abolish.’ Generally, where I stand up to speak, I am ‘ native and to the manner born,’ but here I am a foreigner, standing on foreign soil ; and I ask myself, ‘ What right have I to be here, an intermeddler, an agitator, if you will ?’ But I have in my own mind long come to this conclusion, that ‘ the earth is the Lord's,’ and wherever on His footstool I may be placed, if iniquity is to be arraigned, and immorality is to be confronted, I claim my right before God to denounce it. And so I feel at home here, and that I have a perfect right to speak ; and I do denounce the iniquitous and infamous Acts as disgraceful to Great Britain and the Government thereof. I bid you God-speed ; and if I were to continue here I would try whether I could not help you in any way whatsoever, however feebly, and whatever I could do, I would be very sure to do. Your cause is righteous. This question of pollution—What ! not to be confronted ! not to be talked about ! Men and women to be separate when they talk about it ! Why separate ? If they are virtuous, shall they not speak of that which is not virtuous and denounce it in common ? It struck me as rather singular when I heard of certain gentlemen so exceedingly virtuous, so exceedingly afraid of anything indelicate in the presence of ladies, that they cannot discuss this matter. . . . I have no respect for virtue which will not have pollution brought forward into the very light of the sun, so that being seen it may be abhorred and for ever put away. And this is not a matter of statistics. Your Government sanctions pollution ; and you say pollution is not to be sanctioned. You are bound to confront it as a great immorality, an impiety against God ; and statistics cannot but show (if they are correctly compiled) that immorality does and will work evil in every direction. For God does not make it possible that that which in itself is immoral and iniquitous shall be good anyhow, at any time, or under any circumstances. And thus it is that I would have you take up this matter, and press it home. Let every man and every woman

make it a moral test of purity ; but let not any men dare to assume that they are the advocates of virtue while they are saying, 'Let us have a class of women set apart for infamous purposes, and so regulate them, that men may go on in a lustful course with impunity, as far as that is possible.' No, friends, we must not have any squeamishness about this ; we must speak out plainly ; call things by their right names, and, especially, we must say, 'It is immoral, it is unclean, it is an offence against the Divine Law, and therefore it must be put down.' " After a few words in praise of Mrs. Butler, Mr. Garrison proceeded : " I honour the women as well as the men who are working with her, also doing nobly, and striving to do all that she is striving to do, and has done so well—I honour you all. But the work, as a matter of justice, belongs to ourselves ; *to us, who are men.* It is the men who have wrought this evil. It is the men who have done this wrong. It is the men who are responsible for it—the women did not pass the law. Had there been one single woman in Parliament, do you suppose that there would have been any one man audacious enough, indecent enough, to have dared to stand up and advocate such a measure. But I believe this thing was born in darkness ; it was carried through nobody knew how. It had the very stamp of uprightness about it. All in the dark these Contagious Diseases Acts were passed. How very innocent in name, and yet how thoroughly iniquitous and polluting in intention, while making the best professions—regard for sanitary measures, and so forth, and so forth, and so forth ! Well, friends, you will go on, of course. Not one of you will think of retreating. Why, it is the best investment for the soul's welfare possible, to take hold of something which is righteous but unpopular. *Righteous* but unpopular, for men may get hold of an unpopular cause which deserves to be unpopular and is not righteous. But it invigorates and strengthens us to work in a righteous but unpopular cause ; it teaches us to know ourselves ; to know what it is we are relying on—whether we love the praise of men or the praise of God. As for me, I think I should not know how to take part in a popular movement—it would seem so weakening, so enervating. Everybody is there, and there is nothing to be done, excepting to shout. Let others do that if they like ; but while this world remains as it is, while so much has yet to be *done* to make the world better, God grant that while I live I may be connected still, as far as possible, with causes which, being righteous, are unpopular, and struggling, in God's name, *against* wind and tide. Living and dying I will give my support to such, and look to God for His blessing in the end."

Funds are urgently needed to carry on this important work to a successful issue. Contributions may be sent to, and copies of this leaflet, and further information obtained of, the Secretary of the National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, 2, Westminster Chambers, Victoria Street, London, S.W. Price of this leaflet, 1s. 3d. per 100, post free. Ask for LEAFLET C, NEW SERIES.

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